

POINSETTIAS



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Poinsettias come in shades of red, pink, white, or bi-colors. Actually it isn't the flowers that are the showy part of the plant. The true flowers are very small and are centered in the middle of the colored leaves called bracts. These bracts are what make the poinsettia such an attraction.

Bright light is required for growing poinsettias. Water regularly, letting the soil become slightly dry before the next watering. Use tepid water, as poinsettias do not like to be chilled. Mist their leaves to keep the humidity high, but note that misting painted poinsettias may make them run. They dislike sudden temperature changes so keep them away from cold drafts and furnace registers, and wrap the plants warmly when transporting outdoors.

It is very difficult to get a poinsettia to bloom again the next year. They are called "short day" plants because the colored bracts are triggered when the number of daylight hours goes below a certain point. It is probably best to discard the plant late in the winter, however, if you want to try to get it to flower again, here is the procedure:

- When the leaves have all fallen, cut the stems back to 4" stubs.
- Water just enough to keep the soil from being bone dry and keep the plant in a shady spot.
- Repot in May and start to water regularly again.
- Feed throughout the summer, remove new growth to leave just 4-5 strong, nicely leaved out stems.
- You have to strictly regulate the light for eight weeks starting at the end of September.
- Securely cover the plant with a light-proof container (such as a heavy, black plastic bag) from early evening until the next morning so that the plant is in total darkness for 14 hours every day.
- Strictly follow this regimen for 8 weeks and then treat normally.
- Your plant should bloom at Christmas time.

Although there is no scientific evidence that poinsettias are poisonous, as is commonly believed, it is still best to keep them, and all plants, out of the reach of small children and pets.



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